

STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS
CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND STANDARDS
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FLOOR CONSIDERATION OF
H.R. 1674, THE TSUNAMI WARNING AND EDUCATION ACT
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2006

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of a life-saving bill. H.R. 1674, as amended, will provide the tools our communities need to protect their citizens from the threat of tsunamis. On December 26, 2004, one of the most devastating tsunamis ever recorded struck the unsuspecting nations of the Indian Ocean Basin. According to the U.N., almost a quarter-million people lost their lives or have never been found, and millions more were displaced. These numbers are hard to comprehend, and the effects of this tragedy will be felt for generations. As we recovered from the shock of the event, we naturally began to ask the question “How can we prevent this from happening again?”

H.R. 1674, as amended, the Tsunami Warning and Education Act, is part of the answer. Tsunami warning systems can save lives by giving people the time they need to get out of harm’s way. This bill will expand the coverage of our tsunami warning systems to cover the entire coast of the U.S., not just the Pacific coast, giving more of our citizens critical protection. Of equal importance, this bill will help communities develop efficient evacuation plans as well as effective systems for broadcasting warnings. It will also help educate the public so that they know how to respond to those warnings. In short, this bill will give our coastal communities the tools they need to save lives.

Our nation has been fortunate not to have experienced a tsunami of the magnitude of the Indian Ocean tsunami – yet. Nor have we escaped all harm. Tsunamis have killed over three hundred people in the U.S. in my lifetime, and the threat remains real. It is critical that we give our coastal communities the tools and timely information they need to alert their citizens to coming danger, and passing this bill will help make that happen.

It is unfortunate that it often takes a tragic event to bring natural disaster response planning to our attention. This makes it all the more important that we seize on this opportunity to help prevent future tragedies, here in the U.S., and around the world. It is of utmost importance that we pass this bill to establish a tsunami forecast and warning system for the United States, aid other countries in doing the same, and educate the public to understand and heed the warnings. I want to once again emphasize: this bill will save lives. I urge my colleagues to join me in strong support of H.R. 1674, as amended. I yield back the remainder of my time.